
Information Operations as a Core Competency

Successful Strategic Change Considerations

by David C. Akerson

Editor's Note: This article was first published as a academic paper submission to the US Naval War College in October of 2008.

Introduction

Information Operations (IO) are described as the integrated employment of electronic warfare (EW), computer network operations (CNO), psychological operations (PSYOP), military deception (MILDEC), and operations security (OPSEC), in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own.¹ Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations, goes on to say of the five core capabilities; psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, have played a major part in military operations for many centuries.² This statement suggests 40 percent of military IO capabilities played minor parts in past military operations. However, the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) directed The Department

of Defense (DOD) to treat and mature IO as a core capability of future forces.³ Fully maturing and exploiting 100 percent of the entire spectrum of IO capabilities is now a military mandate. The 2003 DOD Information Operations Roadmap provides the framework to advance the goals of expanding IO as a core military competency.⁴ The DOD framework for expanding IO capabilities is now recognized, however, the scope of implementing various aspects of the mandate is significant and there are many institutional issues impeding military IO core capability expansion. The IO Roadmap identifies the lack of consensus on the definition of Information Operations, or its contributions to mission accomplishment; outdated EW policy and plans; lack of OPSEC planning process and awareness; unclear roles and responsibilities between the Public Affairs and the PSYOP community; and the lack of a systematic means to develop a skilled workforce to leverage IO capabilities and planning. These deficiencies degrade our nation's core capability to combat irregular warfare (IW), catastrophic



US Vice Adm John Bird and ROK Navy Vice Adm Jung Park Sign Naval Cooperation Agreement

Source: defenseimagery.mil



US Army Brigade Pre-Deployment Checkpoint Exercises

Source: defenseimagery.mil

terrorism, employing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and disruptive threats to US ability to maintain its qualitative edge and to project power.⁵

In the five years since the IO Roadmap was published, anecdotal evidence suggests that while the Services are making progress towards leveraging IO capabilities at the tactical execution levels, there is still much to be accomplished to achieve strategic change of this proportion. Strategic change of this magnitude does not happen when funding has been secured for a new piece of equipment, or when new concepts are incorporated in experiments, exercises or even as a unique operation. Strategic change materializes when values are aligned and behaviors are modified to a degree that organizational culture adapts the change, and the change becomes a “way of doing what we do.”

This paper will review two considerations needed for successful strategic change in organizations: organizational culture and individual behavior and will assert that organizational culture and individual behavior are important considerations for maturing IO as a core competency.

Culture

What is organizational culture and why does it matter? According to Edgar Schein, the culture of a group is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions (beliefs), that the group learned (values) as it solved its problem of external adaptation and internal integrations that worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore taught to new members to perceive, think and feel in relationship to those problems.”⁶

Consider DOD as the group for this definition, a group which share basic assumptions that force-on-force is the time tested solution to problems worthy of being passed on to new members to perceive, think, and feel in the same manner for current and future problems. While there are many other aspects of organizational culture, Schein’s view provides the foundational considerations discussed in this paper. By definition and interpretation, DOD cultural attributes (beliefs and values) are then contributing to the current pace for change. Until the core beliefs and values associated with IO (non-kinetic

solutions can solve traditional problems) are adapted throughout the organization, gaps between current IO capabilities and desired end states will continue to exist. Walt Kelly first used the quote “We have met the enemy and he is us” on a poster for Earth Day in 1970. While obviously not enemies, the same DOD leaders who guide the strategic change to incorporate IO as a core capability, are the same leaders shaped by current DOD values and beliefs.

Ignoring organizational culture has an adverse impact on strategic change. According to Larry Bossidy, retired chairman and CEO of Honeywell International, business advisor and author, “The hardware of a computer is useless without the right software. Similarly, in an organization, the hardware (strategy and structure) is inert without the software (beliefs and values).⁷ What an organization believes and how people behave around aligned values of the organization is the culture of the organization, and when culture is ignored, it often results in lost productivity, increased costs, competitive risks, staff issues, and return

on investment shortfalls. In short: more risks and fewer positive results.⁸

It has been eight years since the QDR mandate to develop IO as a core capability of the joint force and organizational culture may be resulting in fewer results. DOD culture is contributing to the existing gaps between IO organization deficiencies and desired capabilities. The Service leaders deciding on the next steps for maturing IO as a core capability share time-tested beliefs about force-on-force solutions to military problems. Only after organizational values and beliefs shift, will behavior shift. At that time, tangible systematic maturing of IO as a core capability will happen.

Leading Strategic Change

If behavior is an indicator of organizational values and beliefs, what are tangible indicators for determining if behaviors are shifting—hence IO core capabilities are maturing? Are DOD leaders making progress towards a consensus on the definition of IO, or its contributions to mission accomplishment? Are OPSEC planning processes improving; unclear roles and responsibilities being resolved; and is progress being made towards a systematic means to develop a skilled workforce to leverage IO capabilities and planning? The answer to these questions depends on who is asked. Each of these issues has an Office of Primary Responsibility charged with its piece of maturing IO as a core competency. In reality, collectively the leaders of these offices are actually facilitating a significant strategic change; the changing of a DOD-wide culture and may require additional tools in their toolbox to help guide systematic change and provide answers to the question: What behaviors are changing and how much progress is being made towards advancing the goals of expanding IO as a core competency?

Simply put, it is about leadership behavior and applying change management principals towards the strategic change. According to Dave Ulrich, Professor of Business, University of Michigan, effective strategic change leaders establish a leadership brand throughout

the organization consistent with an important nature of the organizational change. Leaders own the change and don't assume the change is happening. Across the organization, Ulrich suggests leaders walk the talk, champion the change, and dedicate at least 20 percent of their time to the change. As a result, everyone within the leader's influence knows the change is important.⁹

Question: *Who is championing the IO core competency strategic change in DOD, or within the Services?*

Ulrich goes on to say there are also behaviors leaders should not exhibit when leading strategic change. Leaders shouldn't try to lead change alone; routinely shift to other priorities and behave inconsistently about the change; assume the change will manage itself or be easy; or assume the change will sell itself.¹⁰

Question: *Who is the DOD honest broker for competing priorities and enforcing accountability for inconsistent behavior towards maturing IO competencies?*



A public affairs presentation at the USAF Expeditionary Center
Source: defenseimagery.mil

A possible indicator to determine how much progress is being made towards a strategic change is to consider how much “goodwill” leaders have towards leading a change. Ulrich suggests an organization can assess how important a strategic change is based on a couple of tangible observations. The Calendar Test: how much time are leaders spending on the change? The Energy Test: How much passion and attention are leaders demonstrating towards the change? The Rhetoric Test: How much public and private conversation is going on about the change? In addition, the most important test, the Resource Test: How much money and talent are leaders putting towards the change?

Question: *If evaluated, what would the results show for the Calendar, Energy, Rhetoric, and Resource tests for the leaders of offices charged with closing the IO deficiencies identified in the IO roadmap?*

Organizational vision is an idea of what the future may be (in this case, IO, as a core capability); an image, a strongly felt desire or need to move an organization in a direction. In the Book of Proverbs, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”¹¹ While I don’t believe DOD would perish without IO, I do believe the power of vision as related to IO can not be understated. Are leaders, charged with closing the gaps between organization deficiencies and desired capabilities, creating a compelling message about the future benefits of IO

capabilities? Do planners know what they must do differently to consider the IO piece of the puzzle? Are stakeholders committed to the challenges to achieve success in making IO a core competency? Can the Services sense the change in the air, and are stakeholders empowered by vision, and focused at all levels working towards the vision?¹²

Question: *Who in DOD is painting the clear, shared vision for IO?*

Vision provides the roadmap for alignment and progress and in no place does alignment and progress show up more than in decision-making. According to Ulrich, leaders translate visions into decisions and the workforce sees and understands how the change affects new priorities, resources alignment, accountability, production measures, and what is being talked about at staff meetings and conferences. Decisions are the single critical element that symbolizes to the workforce, the change is important and not a passing fade.¹³ Leaders turn direction into specific, concrete decisions that must be made; define decision deadlines, assign accountability; and create decisions to move the strategic change forward. I am sure all have known leaders that acted the opposite and who made an art out of being vague; never communicated decisions that were made; made decisions without input or engagement; and generally avoided the accountability issue. How decisions are evaluated and executed is critical for leading strategic change.



A student at the USAF Mobile Command and Control Leadership Course conducts media interview training.

Source: defenseimagery.mil

So What?

What does DOD need to do to shift a military culture shaped by beliefs and values tied to traditional kinetic thinking and routine use of PSYOP, MILDEC, and OPSEC to a culture inclusive of the EW spectrum and power of non-kinetic technology (CNO) to achieve desired effects in support of Combatant Commander's objectives?

Can non-kinetic IO solutions become a core capability? The answer is yes. However, organizational values and beliefs drive individual behaviors, which then define organizational culture. This means in DOD, the cultural shifts required to mature IO as a core competency will happen only as fast as behavior changes. Leadership can measure shifts in organizational behaviors. How leaders take ownership of change, display goodwill, articulate a shared vision, and make decisions facilitating movement towards the strategic change are indicators of progress towards the desired end state. ☞

Editor's Comment: Mr. Akerson brings up some extremely valid points in this article using Mr. Ulrich's book as the context. The real question for all IO professionals is if the process of change outlined in the IO roadmap is being achieved in the vision Mr. Ulrich describes?

Footnotes:

1. *Joint Publication, 3-13, Information Operations*, 13 February 2006, ix.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Department of Defense (DOD) Information Operations (IO) Roadmap*, 2003, 2.
4. *Ibid.*, 1
5. *Joint Publication, 3-0, Joint Operations*, 17 Sept 2006, ix.
6. Edgar Schein, *Three Levels of Culture*, *Value Based Management.net* http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/methods_schein_three_levels_culture.htm, accessed on 10 Oct 2008.
7. Sara , Moulten Reger, *Can Two Wrongs Make a Right? Insights from IBM's Tangible Culture Approach*, *IBMPress*, 2006, 6.
8. *Ibid.*, 9,10.
9. Dave Ulrich, "Achieving Successful Change", (*Conference papers, Chicago Ill, Linkage Inc. Best of Organizational Development Summit, May 2006*), 1.
10. *Ibid.*
11. King James Version, Chapter 29, Verse 18, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=proverbs%2029;&version=9>, accessed on 10 Oct 2008.
12. *Ibid.*, 2.
13. *Ibid.*, 3.

